monday / tuesday
28 / 29 august 2006
issue 29

piss clear

Black Rock City's
alternative newspaper

It's the 10-Year Anniversary of Burning Man '96!

You know, that crazy, fabled year when early Burning Man organizer John Law pissed off Larry Harvey by secretly putting a neon smiley face in the head of the Man, and the first year someone died, and the last year we could actually drive around and shoot guns and fuck on the playa, before there were city streets and bureaucratic rules and art funding and an LLC. Good times...

photo by Heather Shirkey

Keeping it real, since 1995

piss clear

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On the cover:
One of only two photos of John Law's fabled neon smiley face inside the head of the Man, 1996. Allegedly, it was only lit for five seconds.

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'96: The tipping point

by ADRIAN ROBERTS

Your editor back in 1996

adrian's rant

Here I am. Back in Black Rock City. My 14th year at Burning Man, my 12th year publishing this newspaper that you're now holding in your hot little hands. And my first year of actually not wanting to be here.

Okay, that's not entirely true. At least, not anymore. But seriously, after last year, I was *not* looking forward to coming back. I kept waiting for my feelings to change. Eventually, they did – but like, only a few weeks ago. Most of the year, I just dreaded coming back to Burning Man.

So what was my problem?

I don't know. Perhaps I was just, literally and figuratively, burnt the fuck out. Let's face it, Burning Man may pretend to be an "arts festival," but it's really more like a week of survivalist desert camping, mixed with considerable substance abuse. Add to that the always challenging task of publishing a newspaper on the playa and, well ... it finally started to take its toll.

But something else was taking its toll as well. Because you know, once you get off-playa, there's a lot about Burning Man that gets pretty annoying – the self-satisfied pretension of certain Burners, for one thing. I mean, it's not a fucking cult. Oh, you go to Burning Man? Big fucking deal! So have 100,000 other people. Don't talk to me about Burning Man like you're something special – because anyone with a week off from work and $800 to burn can manage it. It's not exactly the exclusive Cool Kids Club it was 10 years ago.

10 years of Black Rock City bureaucracy

Yup, it's the 10 Year Anniversary of Burning Man 1996. And if you weren't around then, you might very well be saying, "Whatevs."

Look, I'm not about to wax nostalgic about the "good ol' days." Trust me, I still have plenty of wild nights and crazy days in BRC, otherwise, why would I still be coming here?

But 1996 was an important year in Burning Man lore, history, and mythology. Some call it the Last Cool Burning Man. Personally, I think that's a bit "Burnier than thou." However, it *was* the last Burning Man that was truly anarchic, pranksterish, unregulated, and unbureaucratic.

It was also the year that John Law, a much-loved early Burning Man organizer, got unceremoniously muscled out by Larry Harvey and much of the current Black Rock City LLC. John Law was responsible for so many things in the early days, including surveying the site, cleaning up the playa, and rigging the Man up with neon – including that neon smiley face in the Man's head that graces our cover.*

If the acrimonious split between Larry Harvey and John Law could be summed up by any one thing, that neon smiley face from 1996 is *it*. That smiley is representative of not only the divide that was occurring between Burning Man participants, but also among the organizers as well.

Was it a playful prank, in the anarchic spirit of the Cacophony Society? A spiritual defilement of a venerated totem? Or a prophetic sign of the DisneyMan to come?

You can probably guess which side of the argument Larry was on. He forbid that neon smiley to be turned on at any point during the event. Of course, this being Burning Man '96, someone did it anyway – but only for like, five seconds. Allegedly, we have one of only two photos of it.

Anarchy vs. civility

1996 was the tipping point for Burning Man, a battleground between anarchy and civility. And ten years later, we all know which side won.

Of course, it was also the first year that someone died out here, which helped tip the scales. Sure, it happened four days before the event officially started – and by most accounts, it was due to the victim's own reckless behavior (apparently, it's not a good idea to play "chicken" with a van while drunkenly driving your motorcycle around the playa). But its sobering effect was only amplified five days later when some fucked-up asshole ran over a tent full of sleeping raver kids, severely injuring three of them. That's when you knew that something had to give.

Yes, by most accounts, 1996 was one fucked-up year. Not surprisingly, it was the last year you could drive your car around, and the last year without a city plan and stupidly named city streets. Bluntly put, it was the last year it felt *dangerous* to be out here.

Look, I'm not complaining. Banning cars and guns was a good thing. You get 10,000 people, you're bound to get a few assholes. With 35,000, that asshole quotient goes up significantly.

However, ten years of civility in Black Rock City has unfortunately begat the familiar trappings of bureaucracy. Theme camp registration, art car registration, early arrivals registration ... it seems like everything requires paperwork or a web form these days. Dealing with red tape and bureaucratic bullshit was not something John Law had in mind when he first convinced Larry Harvey to bring his Man out to the Black Rock Desert for a Cacophony Society "Zone Trip" back in 1990.

Look, we understand that as Black Rock City has gotten bigger, certain guidelines needed to be put into place to make things manageable. We're not stupid. Back in the Real World, we're party promoters, so we understand a little about the difficult logistics of throwing an event for 35,000 people.

However, I will say this: as an event grows, you never want to lose sight of your core audience, or why you started your party to begin with. And that's something I question amongst the six principals of the Black Rock City LLC – half of whom haven't been going to Burning Man nearly as long as I have. Do any of them share that same kind of playful, pranksterish spirit that would stick a neon smiley face inside the head of the Man?

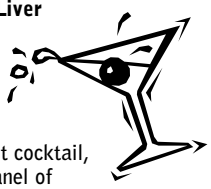
We need paperboys and papergirls!

I'm running out of space, but I suspect this will be an ongoing discussion at our camp this week. So feel free to drop by and share your thoughts. And while you're here, why not pick up some papers to deliver? Yes, we need paperboys and papergirls! If you're all about the gifts and the schwag, let me tell you, nothing gets you free shit like delivering *Piss Clear*. Seriously. We would love the help. Thanks for reading, and we'll see you on the playa!

Adrian

*For more Burning Man history, check out the book *This Is Burning Man*, by Brian Doherty.

5th annual Playa Iron Liver Contest



Another year, another excuse to get drunk! It's time once again for *Piss Clear's* annual **Playa Iron Liver Contest,** where we want YOU to bring us your best drink concoction. We're seeking out the most tasty and potent cocktail on the playa, so if you think you've got it, we wanna taste it!

The rules are simple: Bring us your best cocktail, along with the drink recipe. Our expert panel of judges will be accepting drink submissions on **Thursday, between 3 PM and 6 PM,** at our offices at **6:00 Center Camp at Wheel of Fortune**.

The winner will get their photo and drink recipe published in our Friday edition, along with a prize package that includes a shower in the *Piss Clear* RV, fresh sushi brought in from Reno, and a goody bag filled with all the playa gifts we don't want, including trance CDs, stickers, poetry 'zines, and Fimo necklaces.

Things change

by MALDEROR

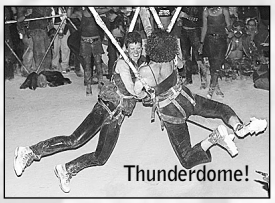
malderor's rant

People are always asking me how Burning Man has changed in the fifteen years I've been coming here. This event used to be centered around driving fast across the desert, shooting high-caliber firearms, skinny-dipping in hot springs, and blowing shit up. In more recent times, it has gotten a good deal more "chill," and they don't let you do that stuff anymore. There's often a distinction between the old-school Burner, who was more of an "amphetamine-charged thrill-seeker" and the newer sort of Burner who is more of an "ecstasy-fueled raver-dweeb." These Kids Today seem to be fascinated with weird concepts like "positivity," "cooperation," and "the environment." To be frank, a lot of people who come out here now think it's some kind of hippie gathering.

New people come to Burning Man every year and often seem surprised that it's not as welcoming as their last Phish show. You've no doubt encountered some of these misguided souls already – vegan dingbats out practicing sun salutations in the morning. There's sometimes a philosophical "disconnect" between the folks who loved the anarchic, violent, punk rock danger of the past, and these new people who "just want everyone to get along" like it's the Summer of frickin' Love.

This is not the Rainbow Gathering.

If this is your first year and you're expecting a free-love-Grateful-Dead-parking-lot thing to develop, be prepared for the worst. There's a lot of menace here, and a lot of casual antipathy. Real Life can be a harsh, miserable experience, and Burning Man isn't necessarily shy about reflecting that. Somebody may try to deliberately piss you off, creep you out, or "bum your high." They may mock your beliefs, lifestyle choices, and fashion sense, using a bullhorn the size of *Piss Clear*'s collective ego.



Thunderdome!

If it's your first visit to our fine playa, be prepared for a distinct lack of lovey-dovey feel-good vibes to emanate from the Thunderdome. Be prepared for flame-cannon-toting freaks who don't much care if you happen to be in their line of fire. Be prepared for Pants Camp to blast a pair of dungarees at your vile nakedness, which, trust me, nobody asked to behold.

This aggressive attitude may well "harsh your mellow." But some folks enjoy these extremes, and revel in the discord. If you're a tofu-eating Vanagon pilot, you might want to arm yourself for this possibility.

It will probably surprise none of you that I got into a fist fight here last year. It was on Burn Night, when things get crazy, everything's on fire, and everyone is hopped-up-on-goofballs. It was about something silly (yes, alcohol was involved) and we were both probably right. But he took a swing and it kicked off. He pulled a knife, the cops came, etc. I don't really begrudge the guy, and I hope to share a cocktail with him this year. If anything, I see his point. He was ranting about hippies, so I gave him a hug just to piss him off. He snapped. (As I said, I see his point.)

But chaotic danger and personal risk are exactly the sort of things that originally typified this event. There was a time when you'd be firing your 9mm from your motorcycle at the Drive-By Shooting Range. You'd build a catapult to heave televisions out across the desert, just to watch them explode. You'd set your cruise control and climb out your sunroof, steering with your feet. You never got up for yoga class. You never worried about centering your goddamn chakra. You didn't worry about gray water because you didn't shower, you just swam in the hot springs. Your neighbors were a half-mile away, so you didn't worry that your camp was cranking Ministry at 7 AM.

It can't be denied that this event has changed – often for the better – since it started. People ask me if I miss the old days. The old days definitely rocked. But, to be honest, I wouldn't trade what we have now. There's stunning art now, instead of a bunch of drunken, angry, anarchists with firearms. There are now girls here, when it used to be 800 guys and no women. There's medical care, ice vending, and other improvements too numerous to mention. Many of these changes arrived at the hands of new people, bringing new ideas. Some of these changes, particularly the volume, scale, and imagination present in the art, are vast improvements over a few beer-addled dipshits trying to burn one medium-sized totemic sculpture.

So yeah, some of us miss the chaos and insanity of the old days. But it's pretty fucking cool the way it is now, too.

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Learn How To Be Really Annoying at Burning Man!

It's true: Just because nobody understands you doesn't make you an artist. But that *doesn't* mean that you can't turn your ability to annoy people into an art form! For just $185, you too can make people remember your experience at Burning Man!

The first portion of the class involves **hands-on workshops** where you'll learn:

- The proper stereo wattage needed to drown out the sound of your un-baffled generator!
- How to set up the flappiest blue tarp atrocity on your block!
- The art of creating all sorts of drama right in your own self-declared "Drama Free Zone."
- The proper way to scream "Wake up, it's Burning Man!" from the top of an art car at 6 in the morning.
- How to discuss the outside world with people who wish you'd just shut up.
- When to start your post-arrival theme camp fundraising (a.k.a. getting your campmates to pay for the awesome stuff that you bought on their behalf).
- How to rail against corporate logos and commerce in BRC while marketing yourself to your fellow Burners in order to make money off of them throughout the year!

For the second part of the class, students are broken up into teams to carry out role-playing scenarios designed to teach them how to be annoying in both Black Rock City and at other year-round Burning Man-related events. The exercises include:

Gifters Remorse: How to express your utter disappointment when the Oriental Trading Company trinkets you hand out as gifts to total strangers don't generate the profound emotional reaction you think they should.

P.I.G.B.A.C.: Proper buzzword usage is essential to being really annoying on the playa. Learning how to cram the words Participatory, Interactive, Gifting, Burner, Art, and Community as many times into one sentence as possible is a must for anyone attempting to be annoying, especially when speaking on behalf of your community.

The third and final section of this 8-hour class is devoted entirely to **Proper Bullhorn Usage.** Guest lecturer Rev. Dak Ultimak of The Church of the Megaphone w/Siren will be will walk students through the most popular models of powered bullhorns on the market today, and give students a historical overview of popular megaphone rantings, beginning with "Go home! The Man will burn without you!" all the way up to "This is the best rave, ever!" The class ends with a real-world exercise out on the playa with your own megaphone, where you can hone your skills that will assure that YOU will be remembered in Black Rock City this year.

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Why is Center Camp such a giant hippie magnet?

Bruce Damar

Reggae on the River is *not* boot camp for BM

by SIR LOIN

sir loin's rant

I bet some of you newbie hippies went to Reggae on the River this year. Did you have fun? Smoke a lot of ganja? Think you can survive Burning Man, now that you've completed your three-day hedonistic reggae rave? Boy, are you in for a big fucking surprise.

While Black Rock City does have a strong hardcore hippie contingency, many Sufi dancing, crystal-worshiping, slow-talking hummus eaters just don't do all that well on the playa. You see, there are no other life forms on the playa besides humans, so your spiritual "one love" energy won't really help you out here. Survival comes from within, you skinny hippie.

And please, get the fuck out of Center Camp! Try to participate in some less offensive way other than taking up space. Do you even have a tent? A stove? A chair? I doubt it. You people are the most unprepared motherfuckers around.

Please, just go home. Don't worry about us, you won't be missed. Besides, being so utterly unprepared, you're all the biggest bunch of whiners around. I don't want to hear your sob stories as I'm sitting down with my coffee and copy of *Piss Clear*. You're some of the most unlucky victims I've ever seen. At any bike accident, there's usually a hippie involved. Who spilled my beer? Oh, the hippie did it. Someone lost their ticket? Yeah, that hippie over there.

The medical tent's full of skinny, smelly, sick, and injured hippies. It must be from all that bad karma from being such a lazy fuck twelve months out of the year. Take my advice: try dressing differently just one week out of the year. Dressing like a hippie is *not* the participation that BM is promoting. Just because you look different, doesn't mean you're edgy, artistic, or even interesting. Your subculture clashes here. Just because you went to ROTR this year, that doesn't mean you're a Burner.

haiku

Think you can
Dance, Dance?
Don this flame-
retardant suit
Fuck up and you're toast

– Orange Peel Moses

Paperboy "gifted"
Electric Purple Kool-Aid
My monkey's broken

Hippies gone wild
Who the fuck
rented this flick?
Where's my water gun?

Who, what,
when, and where?
I've used your
pages often
When the T.P.'s out

Hmm... Survival Guide
Ignored you,
now I read you,
This med tent is nice

Praise the DMV
Who needs
art cars anyways?
Go, censorship, go!

– Cuddles

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2. Received complaints?
3. Gotten the shaft on space?
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